

Needs of the Transportation Community for Foreign Trade and Tourism Data

Transportation facilities, services, and the flows of people and goods do not stop at the international border. The ports of Montreal and Halifax vie with New York to link Europe with markets in the Midwest and Ontario. U.S. airlines compete with foreign flag carriers for passengers at home and abroad. Asian products that formerly reached the eastern U.S. via the Panama Canal now pass through West Coast ports and travel by rail across the continent. Miami is a major hub for passenger flows between Europe and South America, and a point of departure for the nascent cruise ship industry. Growing trade between Canada and Mexico is blazing new north-south corridors through the U.S.

Transportation statistics—like transportation activity—should not be constrained by the border. Informed decisionmaking requires an understanding of how international activity places demands on the domestic transportation system, and how the domestic transportation helps bring foreign business and tourism to the U.S.

The advantage of transborder transportation activity is that movements of people, goods, vessels, and craft are recorded for purposes of tariff collection, immigration control, countermeasures against smuggling, and the calculation of trade balances. The problem is that data collected for these purposes overlap—but do not match—the needs of the transportation community:

- The trade community is concerned with goods and people who enter and exit the U.S. economy, which is not necessarily the same as U.S. territory. For example, “landbridge” traffic between Canada and Mexico does not enter the economy, even though it consumes hundreds of miles of U.S. highways and railroads. Customs is interested only in making sure that everything that entered subsequently left, while the transportation community is vitally interested in how and where the goods passed through the domestic transportation system.

- The trade community is primarily interested in the value and ownership of commodities traversing the border, while the transportation community is concerned with the weight and other physical attributes of the commodity that affect its transportability.
- The trade community is interested in who moved the goods for purposes of recordkeeping and enforcement, while the transportation community is more interested in how the goods are moved.

While the data interests of the trade and transportation communities do not correspond exactly, they are closely enough aligned to be served by one-stop reporting and extensive use of administrative records rather than interviews at the border.

Several efforts are underway to minimize barriers to movement across the border, to improve the effectiveness of contraband interdiction, and to provide an effective trade data base for economic development planners at all levels of government. These efforts can provide an effective data base for transportation planners as well, or they can undermine the utility of trade data for transportation if critical data elements are jettisoned.

For trade data to meet the needs of the transportation community, data elements involving both commodity and passenger flows should include:

- the true geographic origins and destinations of shipments and trips (and not just locations of intervening terminals);
- the frequency and distance of shipments and travel;
- the transportation services consumed and the conveyances and facilities used;
- the port of embarkation or arrival for international movements; and
- the transportation costs to the shipper or traveler, including accidents and damage.

Additional data elements involving commodity flows include:

- volume by commodity type and hazard class, measured by ship-

ment weight and value;

- containerization and other packaging characteristics; and
- characteristics of the shipper and receiver that generate—or are affected by—commodity flows.

Additional data elements involving passenger flows include:

- the purposes and duration of the trip; and
- the demographic and economic characteristics of the traveler and the traveler's origins and destinations that generate—or are affected by—passenger flows.

These and other data elements are combined to forecast future passenger and commodity flows, determine how well the current transportation system serves current and future flows, and to evaluate the consequences of those flows for economic, social, and environmental goals.

While country of origin for imports and country of destination for exports is adequate for understanding intercontinental transportation, greater geographic specificity is needed for shipments to and from either Canada or Mexico to identify, understand, and forecast:

- competition between ports of the three nations for inland traffic;
- competition and complementary activity between parallel transportation services near the borders; and
- north-south corridors between Canada and Mexico.

The U.S. Department of Transportation must ultimately have the same detailed understanding of Canadian and Mexican traffic as U.S. domestic transportation since the systems of the three countries complement and compete with one another. Ultimately, the content and specificity of these data items are essential to estimate the impacts of domestic policies on the ability of the U.S. transportation system to serve the needs of North America and to connect the U.S. with the world.